

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment Field Hearing

"Lake Levels in the Great Lakes"

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Green Bay, Wisconsin

Testimony of Charles M. Imig - 589 Silver Birch Lane, Washington Island,
Wisconsin 54246 -(920) 427-4957 Clean Wisconsin Inc.

A special Thank You to Rep. Steve Kagen, who is exhibiting extraordinary commitment in listening to and acting on Door County's environmental water issues. Also a sincere Thank You to the honorable members of this field subcommittee for allowing me to appear today.

My name is Charles Imig and I have lived on Washington Island as a summer resident since 1943. Washington Island is approximately 4.5 miles by 5 miles in size and is located 5 miles off the tip of the Door County peninsula. It is the home of 680 year round residents. In the summer our population swells to several thousand, as summer residents return and families of tourists abound.

Yachtsmen from all around Lake Michigan make Washington Island a must-see destination. Tourism, the main industry in Door County, brings the county \$453 million per year and Washington Island \$19 million per year.

Our only commercial year-round access to the mainland is via a locally-owned ferry line service. All cars, trucks, passengers, freight, food, mail and emergency services must use this ferry service to access our Island. Last year, the Washington Island Ferry Line completed approximately 3,700 round trips to the mainland carrying approximately 225,000 passengers, 75,000 vehicles and countless tons of freight. This is no small operation.

The entire economy of Washington Island depends on the water.

Problems with our waterways mean problems for the Island's small business owners and their families. Lake Michigan water levels have hit record lows. A person can now walk to islands that were once only accessible by boat. One harbor, where sport fishermen stay at local resorts is closed even to small boat traffic because the channel is too shallow.

Throughout the winter, our ferry line has been dredging its Island and mainland ports and rebuilding its docks to accommodate the low water levels. This has been done at the small business owner's expense so that ferries can maintain a normal schedule. All these efforts do not solve the whole problem. Our main channel coming into the Island, which is a federal waterway, hasn't been dredged since 1939. The low water conditions and the shallow depth of this channel, plus larger deeper draft ferries making more trips than years ago, present a threat of interrupting our service if the waters continue to recede.

In addition, our local marinas have been forced to dredge and, even with those efforts, access to their docks is limited. Keep in mind, our peak tourist season is approximately 3 to 4 months long. The additional cost to dredge will hit the bottom line of the ledger sheet hard and we will all pay for it.

To compound our problems, Lake Michigan has been polluted with invasive species which arrived in untreated ballast waters in ocean freighters. Because of the low water level our Island and Door County beaches have become mud flats and are littered with dead zebra and quagga mussels and are infested with invasive plant species. You cannot walk barefoot on the beaches because the mussels are razor sharp when stepped on. Algae is now accumulating on beaches and rotting. The stench is so great that it is a nuisance to residents and tourists in the peak of our summer season. Local waterfowl are dying from botulism, further compounding our plight.

When yachtsmen can no longer access our harbors and tourists and summer residents no longer find the Island the precious treasure it once was, our Island economy will no longer support the people who make their living here.

Obviously our beautiful waters are in harm's way and the health of our Island and the whole Door County economy is in jeopardy.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!!!

WHAT CAN YOU DO????

- 1 * To assure reliable Washington Island ferry service, you need to place the Detroit Harbor West Channel on the list of URGENT Army Corps of Engineer dredging projects.
- 2 * The most immediate solution is to act upon restricting water flow through the St. Clair River. Numerous studies have been conducted and solutions have been recommended in the past. Latest estimates indicate that the drain hole continues to erode and we are losing 2.9 billion gallons per day out of Lakes Michigan and Huron. The most logical solution is to install an interim, flexible control measure to bring Lakes Michigan and Huron out of crisis levels. The current International Joint Commission (IJC) study board should put their present work on hold, review the 1993 study in light of the current water conditions and get to it.
- 3 Congress needs to focus on reducing water diversions from Lakes Michigan and Huron. One such solution is for the United States government to immediately support and ratify the Great Lakes Compact once it reaches Washington D.C.
- 4 Enact and enforce strong legislation to control nonindigenous aquatic species coming into our waters in ocean ships with untreated ballast water.

Successful resolution of these problems will take bi-partisan cooperation and dedication. If we don't act soon, these trends will become terrible legacies. Restoring our Great Lakes is a moral issue and needs the utmost priority. I beseech you to rise to the level of the solution for current and future generations.

PLEASE ACT NOW!!!!!!

* attached support data

Washington Island is located just off the tip of the Door Peninsula at the very Northeast corner of Wisconsin. Just take Highway 57 North from Green Bay to Sturgeon Bay where it joins Highway 42. You can take either 42 or 57 to Sister Bay, then follow 42 to it's end at Northport Pier.



